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INTERVIEW

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice
With Julie Etchingham of Sky News

December 6, 2005
Berlin, Germany

QUESTION: Secretary of State, thank you very much indeed for joining us on the Sky Report. I'll go straight into the main topic. I know that it's been a subject of discussion here. Are there CIA secret prisons operating in Europe or elsewhere in the world?

SECRETARY RICE: Yesterday, before I left Washington, I made several assurances for my European colleagues: first of all, that the United States does not condone torture, the President does not and will not; and secondly, that we are living up to U.S. law and to our international obligations; that we are respecting the sovereignty of our partners and that there are intelligence activities that obviously we will not talk about. And as I said, I can't talk about whether there are or are not certain kinds of activities going on.

QUESTION: Would they contravene international law if they were --

SECRETARY RICE: Well, I'm not going to speculate on activities that I can't confirm or deny. We have to remember that intelligence is key to this war on terrorism. If you cannot have good intelligence, you can't prevent an attack. And we have to remember that these are people who are living among us, who are wantonly killing innocent civilians. And I mean going after civilians. Not collateral damage of civilians but a wedding party in Amman or a subway stop in Madrid. So this is a different kind of war and we're fighting it with all of the lawful means at our disposal.

QUESTION: You spoke about renditions in your speech when you left Washington. Are they going through UK airspace, using UK airports? And if so, is the UK Government fully aware of that?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, we are not using the airspace or the airports of any of our partners for activities that would lead renditions to torture. We don't send people to be tortured.

QUESTION: But they are happening otherwise --

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SECRETARY RICE: Again, I'm not going to comment on specific intelligence activities. But we have obligations under U.S. law. We have obligations under our international conventions and we are respecting the sovereignty of our allies.

QUESTION: People have reported extensively that you use countries like Egypt and Jordan, that you've received assurances, that you don't deliver people into the hands of torture; and yet, advice that's been given to the State Department in recent history has shown that those countries have a history of torturing people.

SECRETARY RICE: Well, let's remember that rendition is a practice that has been in place before September 11th and after September 11th. It is a practice that we believe is consistent with the law and it is a practice that takes terrorists off the streets. Now, you face a difficult decision as a democratic state: If you cannot prosecute someone that is either a known terrorist or a suspected terrorist, do you simply release them into the general population so that they can kill innocents? Of course not. Sometimes it is important to get them back to their home country, where they may face charges. But we do seek assurances that people will not be tortured. We are a country of laws and we do not believe in torture as appropriate in the international system.

QUESTION: But are those assurances documented? Is that something that is transparent and viewable for people to know? If they are being handed to a third country that there are categoric, written assurances that torture is not being practiced?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, there are assurances and they go through channels and they are assurances that the United States Government relies on.

QUESTION: But they're transparent?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, any intelligence activity is, of course -- has some degree of transparency because we have intelligence agencies that -- intelligence oversight of our agencies. But our practices are consistent with our laws, consistent with our obligations and consistent with our insistence that people are not going to be transferred in order to be tortured.

QUESTION: Why not provide a full list of the detainees? We know that this is an extraordinary operation that the U.S. and its allies is conducting. Why not provide a list of detainees and the locations in which they are held? It would provide people with a picture and presumably would make your life easier on a trip around Europe when so many questions like this are being raised.

SECRETARY RICE: Well, CIA Director Goss has made clear that we do indeed engage in getting intelligence from a small number of extremely dangerous, extremely high-ranking al-Qaida detainees. These are people who plotted September 11th, who we know to be making other plots against civilians. And so that much we have said.

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But intelligence activities are, by their very nature, have to -- where you have to maintain some secrecy about them or they will not be effective. And I would ask people to stop and think about the importance of the effectiveness of intelligence operations. You cannot prevent attack unless you have intelligence and our first priority has to be -- within the law our first priority has to be to protect innocent people from terrorist attack.

QUESTION: But what about due process and due process being seen to be done? If you're going to bring people to account and show your own people that you are operating effectively, that has to be done presumably and people need to know who has been lifted and on what charges.

SECRETARY RICE: Well, we do hold and have made clear that we hold some al-Qaida detainees as unlawful combatants under the law of war. We do so because they have to be taken off the battlefield. We do so because they are valuable for the gathering of intelligence. But we also do so within U.S. law and within our international obligations.

What we can reveal, we do. But we are very careful not to compromise intelligence operations because the goal here is to make certain that another attack does not take place.

QUESTION: Do you agree with Vice President Cheney that the CIA should be exempt from Senator McCain's proposals, the tough legislation underlining the outlawing of torture, that it should be applied to the CIA? Should there be a reassessment of what defines torture?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, I think it is absolutely healthy that in a democratic society we are debating this issue. It's been four years --

QUESTION: That's a yes, so it should be readjusted --

SECRETARY RICE: Well, no, it's been four years since September 11th and so it's not surprising that, as a democracy, we are looking at these issues. And the President has made very clear that he wants to work with the Congress to come to a solution, a good solution that would allow us all to have confidence about what we are doing, but also to preserve our ability to get very important intelligence so that we can save lives.

QUESTION: I'd just ask you one final question on that, a point. Not separate to this entirely, but that's about your own future. You're the only person in this Administration whose poll ratings have held up. If you are pressed by your party to run, would you, for the next candidate as President?

SECRETARY RICE: Oh, I just don't have a calling to do so. I love what I'm doing as Secretary of State. I think this is an extraordinary time. It's a time when the challenges are great because we do face a war on terrorism, we face challenges in trying to help extend the blessings of liberty in places like Iraq and Afghanistan, in Lebanon, in the

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Palestinian territories. But it's also a time when a diplomat like me has a chance to try and make a difference. And so I'm absolutely focused on that. I don't --

QUESTION: But if you're pressed, would you consider it, presumably --

SECRETARY RICE: It's not -- it's not what I want to do. I want to complete this job and then I think I'll go off to Stanford and probably reflect on this extraordinary time.

QUESTION: And that you would acknowledge that it's been a hard time for this Administration, particularly since the reelection of this President?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, there is nothing easy about big historical changes. Nothing easy about times of consequence. You don't get times of consequence in which it's easy. If you look back to the challenges after World War II of reconstructing Europe, of facing down the Soviet threat, of dealing with the fact that the Chinese Communists won their war, their civil war, in 1949, you would never have imagined that I would sit in a unified Berlin in 2005, a Berlin that was divided by those very events of the late 1940s, and in a Berlin now that is at the center of a democratic, unified Germany in a Europe that is almost completely free. You would never have guessed that 1947 and 1948 were going to produce the outcome that makes Berlin what it is in 2005.

That's the nature of consequential times and that's why we are very fortunate, though the times can sometimes be hard, to watch what is going on in places like Iraq and Afghanistan as they are coming to freedom for the first time in their histories, to watch as Lebanon has expelled finally Syrian forces of occupation, and to watch as the Palestinians and the Israelis both have leaders who want to find a path to peace. That's why it's worth whatever difficulty we might be experiencing, whatever disruption we might be experiencing. This is a consequential time and if we do our work well, then some future generation will say that we laid the foundation for a more peaceful and democratic world.

QUESTION: Secretary of State, thank you very much indeed for joining us.

SECRETARY RICE: Thank you.

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